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# Duty in a Training Company

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Given a choice between an assignment to a company in an infantry or armor division or a Ranger battalion and an assignment to a basic combat training (BCT) or Infantry one station unit training (OSUT) battalion, few officers would deliberately choose the latter. They would probably assume that if they served in a training unit their career development would fall far behind that of their peers in TOE (table of organization and equipment) units.

The challenge, excitement, and sheer thrill of commanding a TOE company is hard to match. But an assignment to one of our Army's training units also provides numerous, often unrecognized, opportunities for professional and personal growth. In fact, in many ways, the knowledge, values, and lessons drawn from several years as a BCT or infantry OSUT executive officer or company commander may be as valuable to a young officer in his future assignments as those on the Demilitarized Zone in South Korea or at one of the combat training centers.

In such an assignment he will be afforded a great opportunity to meet his professional obligation to become thoroughly proficient in the individual combat skills and the basic soldier standards. He can do this by either teaching himself or learning from the drill sergeants, who are required to impart to the Army's newest soldiers skills that cover a wide range of military subjects. In fact, these skills are usually taught in as much detail as in most TOE units, and certainly in a more structured manner.

One of the most important skills is basic rifle marksmanship (BRM), and

the young officer should not squander this opportunity to become more knowledgeable in teaching and practicing rifle marksmanship. He should begin with the fundamentals and then polish his ability to transmit those fundamentals to his soldiers. Later, he will work with BRM cadre members who are proficient in advanced marksmanship techniques and can tap their knowledge.

Another subject in which an infantry officer must be smart is drill and ceremony (D&C). Traditionally, this has been classified as NCO business but, if it is, it is also Army business, and an officer has a duty to learn as much about it as possible.

## TRADITION

Whether an officer likes it or not, formations, parades, and ceremonies will always play a major role in Army life. They are also the lifeblood of BCT and Infantry OSUT, because they are critical to the soldierization process. The tradition of soldiering is clearly evident as such skills are developed and they provide a foundation for instruction, discipline, and standards.

Further, BCT and Infantry OSUT are probably the only places where virtually all such activities are performed to exact Field Manual 22-5 standards. If an officer does not learn them at this important stage of his growth, he may never again have such a tailor-made environment in which to learn them.

In addition to the opportunities to increase his technical competence, an officer will find many chances to learn and grow in other aspects of leadership.

For example, the NCOs with whom he will be working are hand-picked professionals operating in an environment in which they are entrusted with measured authority, there are increased risks, and they must shoulder responsibilities that test their mettle. If a young officer can learn to work with and lead NCOs in this environment, he will be able to work with and lead NCOs anywhere.

The officer must learn to enforce standards. A common excuse for sloppy execution or poor leadership is, "They're just new soldiers! What do you expect?" The truth is, though, that most of our newest soldiers are highly motivated and attentive and want to be challenged.

The tasks, conditions, and standards are clearly laid out in a training unit, and there are fewer training distractors than in a TOE unit. Nothing in BCT or Infantry OSUT, other than (perhaps) basic and advanced rifle marksmanship, is so difficult that the soldiers and cadre working together should not be able to execute to near perfection. If there is something they cannot do to these standards — from physical fitness to NBC to guard mount to the five-day FTX — either the leaders don't care enough or they lack the "how-to."

An officer, therefore, has a great opportunity both in learning how to do things and in helping raise the capabilities of his drill sergeants. Under the precepts of small group instruction (SGI), all drill sergeants should be capable of teaching all the subjects in the POI. But the reality is that because drill sergeants in BCT hold a variety of MOSs — combat, combat support, and combat service support — some



are not initially qualified to do so, or if they have the technical knowledge, they are not yet skilled teachers.

The officer, by virtue of his formal and military education, should be comfortable talking on his feet before large or small groups of people. He can thus become a constructive critic of his drill sergeants' instruction methods. He can do this either informally or through formal programs in which the drill sergeants practice teaching their classes, fully or partly, to the company's officers before they must stand in front of their soldiers. Rehearsing with someone who is competent and caring can help them reach excellence.

BCT and Infantry OSUT also provide an excellent opportunity for an infantry officer to learn about soldiers and for our newest soldiers to learn about officers. Like it or not, the company commander and executive officer are the officers the soldiers see day after day.

The officers must insist on speaking to these soldiers frequently, either individually, in small groups, or as an entire company, and must take advantage of every opportunity to participate in their training. Above all, they must not become spectators in their own companies. There are usually a few

soldiers in any given company who are headed for Officer Candidate School, and they will learn about officers' duties by watching their company officers in action. At the same time, an officer will find many rewards in learning about soldiers and in meeting them again and again as they progress through their careers.

Finally, as structured as the BCT and Infantry OSUT POIs may seem, they offer numerous opportunities for a young officer to exercise his creativity and initiative. For example, he can use Saturday afternoons, Sundays, and holidays for reinforcement training, sports programs, charity work, or even small-scale tactical training. Other opportunities such as road marches, FTXs, and tactical end-of-cycle evaluations can help him plan and execute multi-echelon training.

A key advantage to serving on a training installation is the unparalleled opportunity for personal growth. Although officers put in long hours in BCT and Infantry OSUT, they won't face unexpected alerts or deployments. The chain of command permitting, this is a great time to take courses toward an advanced degree, either at the post education center or at off-post cooperative program facilities.

He will also find his service in BCT or Infantry OSUT an excellent time to read important military publications, including the classics, and build a base for greater learning and understanding in the future.

Finally, a training unit is an outstanding place to improve physical conditioning. All too often the physical training programs in TOE units fall apart over the course of a series of 30-day field problems. This certainly is not the case in BCT or Infantry OSUT. Not only does an officer work out every day with his soldiers, he can also participate in many unit and post athletic events.

The key to making all of these advantages possible is both individual initiative and firm, enlightened leadership. A training center's day is long and rushed, and without clear guidance from the chain of command, the company officers' duties may evolve into those of a "crisis management team." The chain of command, therefore, must develop a program that provides for an officer's professional growth and builds on his enthusiasm for military service. A steady flow of motivators such as specialty school slots, dynamic live fires, Expert Infantryman's Badge competitions, exchanges with TOE units, and creative officer professional development classes will further stimulate his development and his love for the Army.

Nothing in a training assignment can duplicate the thrill of a night jump or a company tactical live fire exercise, but a training assignment can be critical to an officer's development. The experiences he gains from serving in a BCT or an Infantry OSUT unit not only serve the needs of the Army but also develop an important base of knowledge and values that will serve him well wherever the Army sends him. It will make a difference.

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